

Franklin Creek

STATE NATURAL AREA



Illinois
Department of
Natural Resources

Franklin Creek State Natural Area

The Area

Franklin Creek State Natural Area is located in Lee County, one mile northwest of the village of Franklin Grove and eight miles east of Dixon, just north of Illinois Route 38. The beautiful Franklin Creek flows throughout the 664-acre park. Several large natural springs, hardwood forests, bedrock outcroppings, and a large variety of flora and fauna comprise a pristine ecosystem.

History

Pioneer families in the 1830s found the Franklin Creek area to be an inviting new home on the sometimes unfriendly prairie. Large, cool springs provided ample amounts of pure drinking water and early refrigeration; hardwood forests provided construction materials; and the creek provided fish for food and water power to run saw and grist mills. The deep, pleasant valleys protected by limestone and sandstone bluffs made ideal homesites shielded from cold winter winds. The mill spring, the

largest in the park, provided water power for the largest grist mill in Lee County, constructed in 1847. Still today, many ponds and rock outcroppings along Franklin Creek carry names given to them by pioneer families.

Natural Scene

The park contains a 180-acre nature preserve, which is an outstanding and diverse natural area in a uniquely beautiful setting. High, rocky bluffs shelter a perennial creek and create an environment in which a rich flora and fauna thrive. The preserve represents the initial acquisition by the State of Illinois in the area and, therefore, has been the cornerstone upon which Franklin Creek State Natural Area is built. With its dedication as a nature preserve in 1970, it became the 24th nature preserve in the State of Illinois—a nature preserve system that now includes more than 291 areas.

The geology of Franklin Creek is of considerable interest as the valley is deep enough to expose three distinct rock strata. New Richmond sandstone, a soft rock of Lower Ordovician age, is exposed at the bottom of the gorge. This is the oldest rock



formation anywhere in the state, dating back to 500 million years ago. Above the New Richmond sandstone lies the Shakopee formation, consisting of sandy dolomite and also being of Lower Ordovician age. This strata is capped with St. Peter sandstone, which is of Middle Ordovician age, approximately 460 million years old. Away from the outcrops along the creek, which have been exposed by erosion, the bedrock is covered with a deep till from the Wisconsin glaciation. Finally, this is mantled with a layer of loess from which the upland soil is developed.

The occurrence of vegetation is influenced by soil characteristics, topography and moisture. Low-lying areas along the creekbed support a bottomland forest dominated by silver maple and hackberry. Slippery elm and Kentucky coffee tree also occur here. Ravines support mesic (intermediate between wet and dry) upland forest characterized by sugar maple and basswood. Paw, paw, an understory shrub of more southern distribution, is found here. On drier sites, a dry-mesic forest of white oak, red oak, black oak, shagbark hickory and hop hornbeam is found.

A small glacial drift hill prairie remnant is present in the preserve. Indian grass and tall dropseed are characteristic plants of this habitat. Other prairie species present include false toadflax, flowering spurge and hoary puccoon.

High-quality, undisturbed cliff communities are present on the bedrock outcrops. Canada yew, an evergreen shrub of more northern woods, is common here. Bladdernut, bishop's-cap, and shooting star also are found here, as well as several species of ferns.

The forested areas provide habitat for many species of nongame wildlife. Woodpeckers, flycatchers, thrushes, vireos,



Natural Scene Continued

and warblers are among the breeding birds on the site. The area provides critical stop-over habitat for many more species during migration. Great blue herons and green herons have been observed here. Mammals utilizing the area include raccoons, chipmunks, gray and fox squirrels, beaver, and deer. Shrews, white-footed mice, weasels, and fox may also be seen. Nineteen species of fish have been recorded from Franklin Creek.



Formation

For years, the Franklin Creek has been a favorite local recreation site. In 1970, Mrs. Winifred Knox donated 100 acres of land for wildlife preservation. Through the 1970s, the Natural Land Institute purchased additional properties as they become available. Franklin Grove area citizens, wanting to see the Franklin Creek area protected, organized in 1981 to form the Franklin Creek Preservation Area Committee. Since the Committee's formation, they have gained the reputation of

being the first volunteer organization in the state to improve idle, state-owned land for park purposes through volunteer efforts. The committee secured donations of money and labor, along with assistance from the Franklin Center Future Farmers of America, to construct roads, shelters, picnic tables, restrooms, run underground electric lines, drill wells, and clear hiking trails. Dedication services were held Aug. 28, 1982, to officially open the park. In April of 1986, the State of Illinois appointed the first site superintendent to manage the new park.



Facilities

Picnicking: Norwegian Hill and Mill Springs Day Use Areas have two and three shelters respectively. Each shelter is complete with electricity, cooking grills, picnic tables, restrooms and drinking water. The facilities at Sunday's Shelter are totally handicapped accessible. A walk-in picnic area with parking by Sunday's Bridge offers four secluded picnic areas with picnic tables and grills. The Sunday's, Bartlett, Hausen-Knox and Banker shelters may be reserved by contacting the site superintendent.

Grist Mill: The newly reconstructed Franklin Creek Grist Mill

became operational in 1999. It is open to the public, initially, on weekends from April 1st to November 1st -- or anytime by appointment by calling the Grist Mill at 815-456-2718 or the park office. This very large reproduction is modeled after the original corn meal and flour producing mill built in 1847. Community volunteers, in large part, secured donations and provided the labor to complete this water-powered structure. Now the Franklin Creek Preservation Area Committee has a long-term lease to operate and maintain the facility. Along with milling demonstrations, the building serves as a visitor center for the natural area. All four levels of the Grist Mill are handicapped accessible.

Trails

Hiking: Four and one-half miles of hiking trails are marked and maintained at the park. All trail markers are numbered and clearly shown on the park map to help you follow the trails. The Mill Springs Handicapped Trail is a unique, concrete-surfaced trail suitable for people of all mobility levels. The trail leads to the beautiful Mill Spring and possesses an easy rating. All other trails possess a medium difficulty rating. Pioneer Pass is highly recommended to see the park's unique, natural beauty. The three creek crossings on Pioneer Pass are wet at this time pending the construction of foot-bridges.

Equestrian: The equestrian area contains six miles of trails. The Rock River Trail and Horseman Association has been instrumental in developing and maintaining this area. Equestrian facilities include a picnic shelter, restrooms, drinking water and an outdoor show arena. Equestrian, overnight, Class "C" camping is available.

Snowmobiling: Four of the six miles of equestrian trails serve as snowmobile trails after the hunting season closes and a four-inch snow base exists.

Cross-Country Skiing: Two of the six miles of equestrian trails serve as ski trails winding through 65 acres of rolling, wooded landscape. Trails possess a medium difficulty rating and are opened after hunting season closes.

Fishing

Fishing is allowed in Franklin Creek on state-owned property. Use your park map to be sure you are on park property. Franklin Creek is not stocked at the present time, but does support a population of smallmouth bass, channel catfish, carp, redhorse and rock bass.



Hunting

At this printing, hunting is limited to archery deer and wild turkey hunting and only allowed north of Franklin Creek in the equestrian area in season. The area consists of 180 acres of hardwoods and brushy fields.

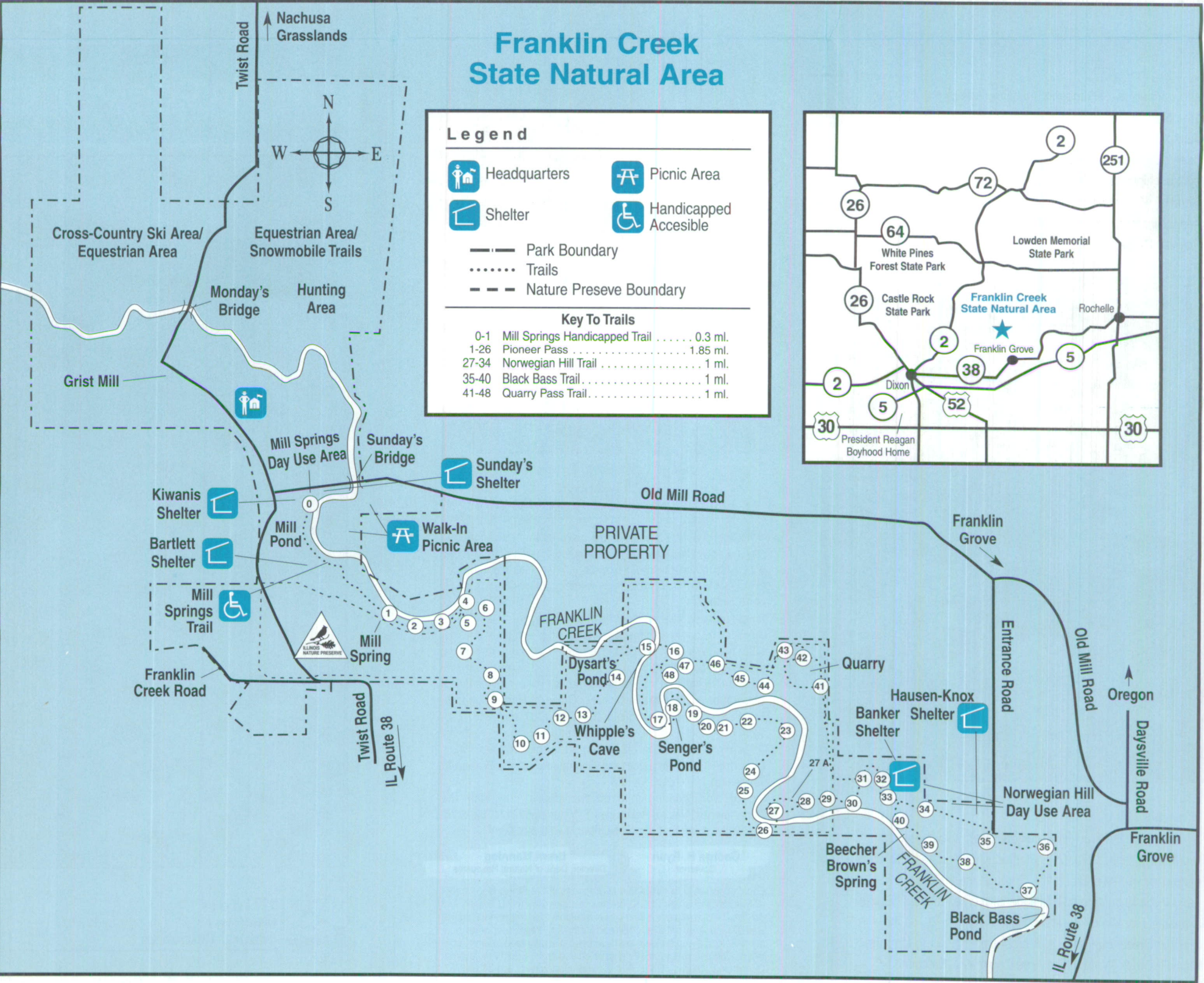
Please: This park is for all to enjoy, so help keep it clean. Put all litter in the nearest trash container. No plants or parts of any tree may be removed or damaged. If you have a questions or need help, contact the site superintendent.

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Franklin Creek State Natural Area

1872 Twist Road

Franklin Grove, IL 61031, 815-456-2878

- While groups of 25 or more are welcome and encouraged to use the park's facilities, they are required to register in advance with the site office to avoid crowding or scheduling conflicts.
- At least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors.
- Pets must be kept on leashes at all times.
- Actions by nature can result in closed roads and other facilities.
- We hope you enjoy your stay. Remember, take only memories, leave only footprints.
- For more information on state parks, write to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Office of Public Services, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62701-1787, call (217) 782-7454 or visit its website at <http://dnr.state.il.us>.
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